

First documented record of Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* for Mozambique

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Première mention documentée du Bécasseau à cou roux *Calidris ruficollis* pour le Mozambique.

Le 9 septembre 2015, un Bécasseau à cou roux *Calidris ruficollis* muant en plumage internuptial a été photographié sur une petite zone humide temporaire dans une banlieue de Maputo, Mozambique. L'oiseau est resté sur le site jusqu'au 28 septembre. Il s'agit de la première donnée pour le pays, une mention de 1977 ayant été retirée par l'observateur. L'espèce niche principalement en Sibérie du nord et hiverne de l'Asie du Sud-Est jusqu'en Australie et la Nouvelle Zélande ; en Afrique, des occasionnels ont précédemment été observés en Somalie, au Kenya et en Afrique du Sud.

On 9 September 2015, I visited a small temporal wetland in the Triunfo suburb of Maputo, Mozambique (25°54'43"S 32°37'55"E). The site held some waders, including several Little Stints *Calidris minuta*, most of which were in summer plumage, and a single stint in mostly winter plumage that appeared relatively bull-necked, was shorter legged and had a noticeably horizontal carriage. It remained separate, often feeding alone, and was quite approachable, permitting me to take a series of photographs, some of which I shared subsequently with D. Bakewell, who identified the bird as a Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*. The following morning I found it again and took additional photographs, which I posted on the SA Rare Birds Facebook page, whereupon several birders confirmed the identification. The stint remained at the site intermittently until at least 28 September.

Description

Very similar to a winter-plumaged Little Stint, some of which were present for direct comparison, but noticeably larger headed, bull-necked and tending to carry its head lower, 'in front' rather than 'on top of' its body (Figs. 1–2). Although the body plumage was often fluffed up, it still appeared longer bodied and flatter backed, an impression enhanced by a tendency to carry itself more horizontally than Little Stints. Close inspection revealed the tarsus to be shorter than that of Little Stint, the short-legged impression being enhanced by shorter visible tibia (Fig. 3). Bill shorter than most Little Stints: c.70% of the >20 Little Stints present had a longer bill and none had a shorter bill. The bill looked more tubular from some angles, but showed a slight vertical narrowing of the maxilla and mandible near the tip. Corresponding lateral broadening



Figure 1. Adult Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* moulting into winter plumage, Maputo, Mozambique, 13 September 2015 (Johan Grobbelaar)

Bécasseau à cou roux *Calidris ruficollis* adulte muant en plumage internuptial, Maputo, Mozambique, 13 septembre 2015 (Johan Grobbelaar)



Figure 2. Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* (left) and Little Stint *C. minuta*, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 September 2015 (Gary Allport)
 Bécasseau à cou roux *Calidris ruficollis* (à gauche) et Bécasseau minute *C. minuta*, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 septembre 2015 (Gary Allport)

Figure 3. Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* (left) with four Little Stints *C. minuta*, Maputo, Mozambique, 12 September 2015; compare leg length (Gary Allport)

Bécasseau à cou roux *Calidris ruficollis* (à gauche) avec quatre Bécasseaux minutes *C. minuta*, Maputo, Mozambique, 12 septembre 2015 ; comparer la longueur des pattes (Gary Allport)



Figure 4. Extended right wing of Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Maputo, Mozambique, 13 September 2015 (Lizet Grobbelaar)

Aile droite étendue du Bécasseau à cou roux *Calidris ruficollis*, Maputo, Mozambique, 13 septembre 2015 (Lizet Grobbelaar)

Figure 5. Left wing of Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 September 2015 (Niall Perrins)

Aile gauche du Bécasseau à cou roux *Calidris ruficollis*, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 septembre 2015 (Niall Perrins)



of the tip produced a slight 'blob' effect when head on.

Plumage was very similar to winter plumage of Little Stint, but the unmoulted lesser coverts were noticeably uniform, showing no pre-breeding feathers with the black centres and ginger fringes that would be expected in a Little Stint and were shown by all five adult Little Stints that I was able to photograph alongside the bird (Figs. 4–5).

Mantle and scapulars varied in tone according to the light. On cloudy days with even light the feathers appeared pale grey with a clean narrow black shaft-streak (Fig. 1). On sunny days and in strong light they sometimes appeared slightly browner with a narrow darker suffusion parallel to the feather shaft (Fig. 5; see also video at <https://vimeo.com/140647462>).

Vocalisations

I saw and heard the bird call three times. Twice it uttered a single short *preer* or *tiir*, not dissimilar to the *chit* or *pit* of a Little Stint, but lower in tone, more prolonged, slightly disyllabic and with a definite rolling or trilling quality. It reminded me of the call of a Dunlin *C. alpina*. When interacting with Little Stints on 15 September it repeatedly gave a series of chirruping trills *terreet-terreet-terreet*, apparently in aggression.

Identification

The body structure characters first noted by Sinclair & Nicholls (1976) and expanded upon by Bakewell (2014), were well illustrated by this bird. It was most noticeably different from Little Stints when feeding alongside them, especially early in the morning when it always looked bull-necked

and long-bodied (see video). These characters were still visible in the heat of the day, but the bird was then rarely seen alongside other stints as it often became more aggressive.

The bill was indeterminate, within the range for either species, but the shorter legs were very apparent at times. This clearly is an excellent feature (see Round *et al.* 2012), especially if other stints are present. Note that the exposed tibia is important, not just the tarsus.

Body, bill and leg structure are all good characters, especially for initial detection of birds that do not show distinctive plumage, but call appears to be a useful feature too. Earlier accounts of the calls of Little and Red-necked Stints (e.g. Hayman *et al.* 1986) note the differences, but suggest that Little Stint is able to produce a wider range of calls. This may be the case on the breeding grounds, but some more recent texts underline their usefulness at other seasons too (Veit & Jonsson 1987, Harris *et al.* 1989, 1996, Lewington *et al.* 1991). Little Stint utters a short, abrupt, high-pitched *chit*, *tit*, *stit* or *seet* and a tinkling *tililil*, whereas Red-necked Stint produces a slightly deeper, rolling *tirriw*, *kreet*, *kreep*, *chreek*, *klyt*, *prp*, *prleep*, *churk* and a *tirriw-chit-chit*, *hwit-hwit-hwit*. Note that Sinclair & Nicholls (1976) were amongst the first to flag this very useful character. The bird in Maputo was identifiable on this character alone, especially when aggressively interacting with Little Stints.

Finally, the plain 'winter' greyish lesser coverts were consistent with Red-necked Stint, although it is still unclear if Little Stint always shows 'summer' black and ginger-fringed lesser coverts at this season.

Mozambique records

There was one previous record of Red-necked Stint in Mozambique of a bird that spent the (austral) summer of 1977 on the beach at Costa do Sol, Maputo (Hockey *et al.* 1986), but this record has now been withdrawn by the observer (A. Vittery *in litt.* 2015). The original material relating to the record, which was probably held by the Southern African Rarities Committee, has unfortunately been lost. The record reported here thus becomes the first authenticated record of Red-necked Stint for the country.

Range and status in Africa

Red-necked Stint breeds mainly in northern Siberia and winters from South-East Asia to Australia and New Zealand (van Gils & Wiersma 1996). It is probably an annual visitor to the African continent in small numbers, with records in Somalia (Ash & Miskell 1998), Kenya (Finch & Turner 1989) and South Africa (Hockey *et al.* 2005). The first South African record was made in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, in November 1963 and there were 26 confirmed records up to 1994, most from the Durban area and Berg River estuary, Western Cape, spanning August–April, with the majority in October. Most records are of birds in partial or full breeding plumage, when confusion with Little Stint is less likely (Hockey *et al.* 2005).

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